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STATE FOR SA/INS
PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: PTER PGOV PREL CE LTTE

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: NORWEGIAN ENVOY SAYS TSUNAMI
COOPERATION DOABLE--IF GSL WANTS IT; EU REP MAY DEFER TALK
WITH TIGERS

Classified By: AMB. JEFFREY J. LUNSTEAD. REASON: 1.4 (B,D).

¶1. (C) In a March 6 conversation with the Ambassador, Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar, summarizing his findings after a trip to Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) headquarters in Kilinochchi the previous day, said that "if the Government of Sri Lanka really wants a mechanism (to cooperate on tsunami assistance), they can get it." He added that Norwegian Foreign Minister Petersen would be calling President Chandrika Kumaratunga to make this point on March

¶7. The Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) had made numerous comments on the Norwegians' draft proposal for the mechanism--most of them minor bureaucratic quibbles, he noted. Brattskar said the GSL also has some important and legitimate concerns, including protection of minority rights and not allowing the LTTE to gain control of offshore resources. He said he had reminded the GSL to view the mechanism as a political issue, rather than a bureaucratic one. In fact, he said he had emphasized to the GSL that Tiger agreement to a mechanism would be tantamount to an implicit recognition of the principle of federalism--and thus a substantial LTTE concession.

¶12. (C) Brattskar said he was concerned that, despite the encouraging signals he had received from Kilinochchi, the GSL appeared to be hesitating. If the GSL cannot agree to this comparatively simple arrangement, how will it be able to negotiate something far more difficult--like an interim administration? he queried. And if it becomes obvious that the GSL cannot do that and never will be able to do that, how will it be possible to maintain the Ceasefire Agreement? He indicated that GSL failure to overcome its penchant for bureaucratic nitpicking and see the big-picture benefits of an aid cooperation mechanism could undermine the strength of the ceasefire.

¶13. (C) In a separate conversation on March 6, EU Charge d'Affaires Wouter Wilton told the Ambassador that the GSL had agreed that Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy, could visit Kilinochchi during her March 7-8 visit to Sri Lanka on two conditions. First, Ferrero-Waldner should bring the LTTE leadership "clear messages" stressing the need for a joint mechanism on tsunami relief; urging the Tigers to renounce violence and respect human rights; and underscoring the importance of adhering to the principles of the Oslo Declaration. Second, the GSL requested that Ferrero-Waldner issue a public statement confirming that she had passed these points to the Tigers.

¶14. (C) Nonetheless, Wilton said, Ferrero-Waldner may not go to Kilinochchi after all. The reason: late March 5 the LTTE called, advising that Tiger supremo Prabhakaran was indisposed with an unspecified "childhood illness" and thus unable to meet Ferrero-Waldner. The EU Mission was thus considering postponing the trip to Kilinochchi, deferring discussions until a previously scheduled trip to Europe by LTTE political wing leader Thamilchelvan later in the month.

¶15. (C) Comment: It is ironic that the GSL is urging the EU to press the Tigers on a joint cooperation mechanism at the very time, according to the Norwegians, the GSL appears to be dragging its own heels on the same point. Our Norwegian colleagues have often (unfavorably) contrasted the GSL's legalistic, bureaucratic approach to the Tigers' more direct, pragmatic style. (In the GSL's defense, directness is a virtue more easily wielded in dictatorships--like Prabhakaran's--than in democracies.) Moreover, the mutual (and usually well-founded) distrust each party harbors about the other's motives raises an immediate red flag any time one side seems disposed to accept a proposal. Unfortunately, this time the GSL's pettifogging may sink a proposal that could be a crucial first step toward building confidence between the two parties. The recent uptick in tit-for-tat violence (septel) underscores more urgently than ever the need for some concrete progress in the peace process. We will continue to urge the GSL to consider carefully and expeditiously this important opportunity to move ahead.

